



Reducing Food Hardships for Ohio Families

Factors including rising prices for food, housing, childcare, utilities, transportation, and other basic household needs, as well as reductions in or elimination of federal programs that helped families make ends meet, continue to drive households with children to seek help from the Ohio Association of Foodbanks statewide food pantry network in historic numbers and with growing frequency. In state fiscal year 2024, Ohio's food pantries provided take-home groceries to help meet nutritional needs for 4.8 million children, which made up 30.4% of the 15.9 million people served. Need has continued to climb in the years following the pandemic; Ohio foodbanks served 73% more children in SFY 2024 than they did in SFY 2022, when they served 2.8 million children.¹⁴

Ohio's leaders seeking to help reduce economic hardship for families with children and promote quality outcomes for Ohio's kids should look to Ohio's childcare sector. Working families don't only rely on quality childcare year-round – including when their school-aged students are out of school for the summer – to keep their kids cared for, safe, engaged, and active. They also count on child care facilities, summer sites, and afterschool programs for healthy meals and snacks for their kids. However, federal reimbursements for those meals are not keeping up with the costs involved in procuring and preparing nutritious, delicious meals. At Children's Hunger Alliance (CHA), demand is similarly higher than ever with a weekend meal wait list of 85 schools, and a lack of sufficient staffing to help in-home and child care center providers access to nutritious food for the kids in their care.

Children who do not have nutritious or sufficient food struggle to learn, with potentially long-lasting physical and psychological issues that will also affect their ability to earn a living. To be the best state to raise a family, Ohio must give children all the tools they need to thrive and view food security as an essential ingredient to family stability and overall health.

Policy

- ***Streamlining access to federal nutrition programs:*** Additional direct certification between programs would ensure that families and children are enrolled in the programs for which they are eligible. The Ohio General Assembly could direct agencies, like the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM), and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) to share data and work together to ensure eligible families are directly enrolled in programs like SNAP, Medicaid, and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) based on their eligibility for other program(s). This reduces the burden on families and county

¹⁴ Duplicated service statistics

caseworkers during the application and recertification processes, reducing caseload churn and freeing up resources to focus on other priorities for improving family stability. Additionally, thousands of Ohioans have had millions of federally-funded SNAP benefits stolen by organized criminals who have targeted Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards for theft. EBT cards must be modernized (upgraded to chip-enabled or tap-to-pay technology) to prevent more vulnerable Ohio families from being victimized.

- ***Investments in the emergency food network:*** Far too many hardworking families with children simply are unable to afford enough food after they have paid for housing, utilities, transportation, health care, medicine, childcare, and basic household necessities. Others need a safety net to turn to when they experience an unexpected crisis, from a car repair to lost wages due to unpaid sick days. Fortunately, [the State of Ohio can continue to support Ohio foodbanks](#) through the existing Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program, which has supported Ohio farmers and families for three decades.
- ***Strengthening school meals and meals at childcare centers:*** Every student in Ohio should be able to count on wholesome meals as part of their school day. Every child in Ohio should be able to count on wholesome meals at daycare, afterschool, and summer programs. [Making meals for all students](#) part of the school day reduces stigma and reduces the burden on families and schools to submit applications and determine eligibility. Enhancing support for meals available through childcare providers promotes health and educational attainment year-round. [Visit the Children’s Hunger Alliance website](#) to learn more.
- ***Modernization of WIC:*** Ohio must modernize its implementation of the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Ohio’s program needs to be transitioned to an online program, where benefits are loaded onto an EBT card like the SNAP program and where individuals can complete a full application online. Ohio is one of just 9 states still requiring in-person office visits to load WIC benefits, which led to a reduction in Ohio’s WIC caseload during the pandemic at a time when more mothers, infants, and children needed support.
- ***Family focused state tax credits:*** It costs a lot to raise a family; Ohio needs to support families as it strives to attract and retain workers. A thriving families tax credit would help nearly 986,000 Ohio families and 1.8 million children under 18 and provide eligible families with an average tax refund of roughly \$1,000 a year. This tax credit would directly improve food security, as demonstrated by the significant reductions in food insufficiency when the federal expanded Child Tax Credit was available through advance monthly payments in 2021.

Challenge

Ohio’s families have sought help from Ohio’s hunger relief network more over the past two years than at any time in the past three decades. Persistently high costs for food, combined with a lack of affordable housing, rising utility costs, increased transportation expenses, climbing childcare costs, and more, are contributing to [rising rates of child and overall food insecurity](#). Lack of access to adequate, nourishing food not only causes immediate hardship and suffering, but negatively impacts educational attainment, child health and wellbeing, and future economic and health outcomes as children grow.

Opportunity

We know what policy changes would alleviate hunger and support financial stability for families. The evidence is also clear that these hunger-fighting policies would lead to better learning and health outcomes for young Ohioans. The whole state benefits when all Ohio children and families are given the tools to thrive. The 136th General Assembly and the DeWine Administration have the opportunity to invest in a hunger-free future for all Ohio children during this biennial budget.

Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendations

- Invest in Ohio’s emergency hunger relief network so families can turn to their local food pantry when they experience a crisis – support the Ohio Association of Foodbanks state-funded food programs, the Ohio Food Program and Agricultural Clearance Program.
- Invest in efforts led by Children’s Hunger Alliance to get food to children where they are at including family childcare and childcare centers, school, afterschool, weekend, and summer programs – including funds to remove schools from waitlists for weekend meals.
- Streamline access to nutrition programs by directing agencies to adopt cross-enrollment initiatives and to utilize direct certification.
- Protect access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for families by modernizing Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards to deter and prevent theft of grocery benefits.
- Support the modernization of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to improve participation in the program.
- Create a Thriving Families Tax Credit to support Ohio families with affording basic needs including rent, childcare, and groceries.
- Invest in school meals for all to support better learning and life outcomes for the next generation.

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